

An Exchange

What Came of a Man's Unwittingly Appropriating Another's Coat

By WALTER B. STURGIS

I never put on a winter overcoat until the days begin to lengthen and the cold begins to strengthen. One morning about the 1st of January, when the thermometer had dropped to zero, I took out my heaviest outdoor garment and took it to the window to see if the moths had been using it. It did not look familiar to me. I got all my clothes at Darby's, so I looked at once at the tailor's mark under the collar and saw the name of a London maker. I was astonished. The coat was not mine and never had been mine. The most natural and probable explanation was that the last time I had worn a heavy coat the season before I had gone into a restaurant or hotel and hung it up. On going out I had taken another man's coat, leaving him mine. Thrusting my hand into the pocket, I took out an unsealed envelope with a photographer's printed name and address on it. Within was the likeness of a girl, about which was folded a bit of paper on which was written:

My Dear—I send the picture. Some say it is very good of me; others don't like it. I'm curious to hear what you have to say about it. Your loving
MOLLY.
Monday evening.

There was no address on the envelope, and I inferred that either it had not been sent through the mail or, if it had, it had been inclosed in another envelope. The only clue I had to the owner was the name of a tailor in London. I being in America and there not being much likelihood that the maker could tell for whom the coat had been built, I did not think it worth while to try to recover my property or return what I had taken.

When I first looked at Molly's photograph I was not especially attracted by it. But I am free to confess that the faces which have most impressed me have at first made little or no impression on me. Possibly in this case I was later influenced by something I noticed written on the back of the photograph in pencil and which escaped my observation when I first discovered it. The words were, "A peach!"

However, I had changed from indifference to interest in the face photographed before seeing this encomium, which I inferred had been written by the recipient. It was rather a confirmation of my later impression that a creator of it being a bachelor and fancy free, together with a bit of romance in my nature, I confess I was on the lookout for a mate. Indeed it is a question with me if both men and women, unmarried, are not though unconsciously, always in their hearts expecting the appearance of a life companion.

At any rate, I put Molly's photograph on my dresser and became very fond of her. It grew upon me that she was one to trust—no who, in case of need, would step to the front, a tower of strength. One evening when I came to my room Molly had disappeared from my dresser. I was surprised at the disappointment I suffered at not seeing her. I moved the dresser to see if the photograph had not fallen and found it on the floor. The incident, though trifling, suggested to me that if the photograph had become so necessary to my comfort, what would the original be.

One evening I went to a function—a bridge party, if I remember correctly—and on leaving stood waiting in the hall, hat in hand and overcoat on for my sister, who was putting her wraps aside. On changing the direction of my eyes whom should they hit upon but Molly. She was standing in a doorway looking at me curiously, but the moment I fixed my gaze upon her she turned away and passed out of sight.

I did not leave the house till I had learned her address. Why had she looked at me, whom she had doubtless not seen before, with more than the interest she would take in a stranger? I was puzzled for a reason. I was interested in mental telepathy, believing that there is something in it, and wondered if the interest that had developed in me for her could have communicated itself to her through some mental process not yet laid bare to us.

I had no trouble in making Molly's acquaintance and lost no time in doing so. My sister Ruth managed it for me, first laying a plan for her own acquaintance with Molly, then contriving a meeting between Molly and myself. Molly said she would be pleased to meet Ruth's brother and would like to have her own brother meet Ruth. Of course I cautioned Ruth to say nothing about the photograph which she had seen often on my dresser. I proposed to announce my acquaintance of it in my own good time.

There was no reason for me to suppose when I was presented to Molly that she had any knowledge of me whatever except having seen me for a moment in the hall after the bridge party. Indeed, she gave no evidence of remembering having seen me then. I was certainly much more pleased with her than with her photograph and struck with the advantage or disadvantage a living person has over his or her likeness. Character may be stamped on a photographed face, but

other attributes are lacking. Molly, for instance, had an extremely pleasant voice, an honest smile, and when her face lighted she was a very different person from when her face was at rest. While she was sedate rather than frivolous, at times she was merry.

From the moment I saw Molly in the flesh I resolved to win her if possible, and I wished to withhold any mention of having fallen into possession of her picture and keeping it on my dresser, falling gradually in love with merely her image, till my proposal, when I intended to make the most of it. Molly accepted my attention. But most girls, I believe, like to keep a suitor in doubt, which they can do without the slightest trouble. All they have to do is to frown occasionally or excuse themselves when he calls on the plea of indisposition and the bottom of his universe drops out immediately. Molly played these little games on me so often that I was discouraged. I thought that if I could only reach a point where I could ring in my long adoration of her photograph her heart would warm toward me at once.

Meanwhile another little romance that I cannot develop here was going on between my sister Ruth and Molly's brother. Molly had noticed it and spoke to me about it, but I was so interested in my own affair that I had no thought for any others. I didn't happen to meet Molly's brother, but I was not slow in making up my mind that he was the person to whom she had given the photograph. A brother would not be likely to write "A peach" on the back of a sister's picture, but the brother in this case might have had a friend who admired the sister.

One thing I noticed in Molly's treatment of me that I construed favorably. Whenever she would give me the cold shoulder she would follow up her act by being especially gracious. After one of these fits of graciousness I resolved to bring matters to a crisis. I did not begin with so unromantic a matter as an exchange of overcoats. I led up to the subject by telling her that I had been familiar with her lineaments before I had ever seen her. She evidently saw what was coming, not from my words, but my manner. When a man has a proposal on his mind and trying to find words in which to make it there are few girls who do not know the inevitable result. I might just as well have said nothing after making the start, and what I did say was not what I had intended to say. At any rate, I forgot to tell her that her likeness had been on my dresser for a long while before I had met her. Her reply to my proposition was startling.

"Why haven't you returned Bob's overcoat?"

I drew aside to get a better view of her expression. She was toying with some ornamental work on her skirt, her eyes cast down. Nevertheless I detected a slight quirk to the corner of her mouth.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Come; don't pretend what's not true," she replied. "You know you have a picture of mine that didn't belong to you."

My astonishment, my curiosity, went down before the desire of my life. I told her that fate had thrown into my possession a picture which from the day I first saw it had grown upon me, had enthralled me, had been the beginning of my first and only love. Fate had thrown it in my way.

"You mean fate threw Bob's overcoat in your way, the overcoat happening to contain my photograph."

"This matter of fact recognition of my outburst somewhat cooled me."

"How did you know about the exchange of coats?" I asked.

"Bob had his coat taken the day I sent him my likeness. I knew the pattern of the cloth well and have been looking for it ever since. The moment I saw you at the breaking up of the bridge party, standing in the hall with Bob's coat on, I recognized it at once."

"And Bob?"

"I saw by the way you were looking at me that you had recognized me and had done so by my photograph. I inferred that you would seek me and kept my own counsel. I haven't yet told Bob or any one else that you have been wearing his coat."

I looked at her steadily for a few moments, then broke out again, but in a different vein.

"I've been nursing this matter for months, intending a pleasant surprise, and now you've taken the wind out of my sails. Ever since I met you you've known that I had been in possession of your picture. There's no use in a man trying to impress a woman by chicanery or concealment. She'll beat him every time. When I saw you look at me the evening you first saw me I fancied that some telepathic process had informed you that I and you were destined."

"It did. I saw admiration in your glance."

"Oh, that was it! Anyway, the game has all been in your hands. I count for nothing. I am only a beggar."

She was touched by my disappointment, the abject position in which I found myself. She felt for my hand and drew closer to me. My victory came through defeat, but since I had achieved all I had set out to achieve I did not reprove.

What was my gain was another's loss. The man—a chum of Bob's—who had written "A peach" on the back of Molly's photo was an aspirant for her hand when I appeared on the scene and was obliged to withdraw in my favor. Bob and Ruth are married, and Molly and I are engaged. It's all out now, and Bob and I have re-exchanged coats. As Molly's likeness grew on me before I had seen her and as she grew on me before we were engaged, she is now growing on me in our betrothal. I wonder if she will continue to grow on me after we have been married. I believe she will.

ENSEMBLE SETS.

Hat, Cape and Muff of Satin and Marabou.



SET IN SATIN AND MARABOU.

It is very Frenchy and chic this season to have an ensemble set, consisting of hat, cape and muff, made of satin and marabou.

Such a smart little outfit is pictured of black satin and white marabou.

The muff is an enormous confection resembling a big, loosely tied bow. And there is an air of newness about the shoulder cape, which is gathered in lap shade effect.

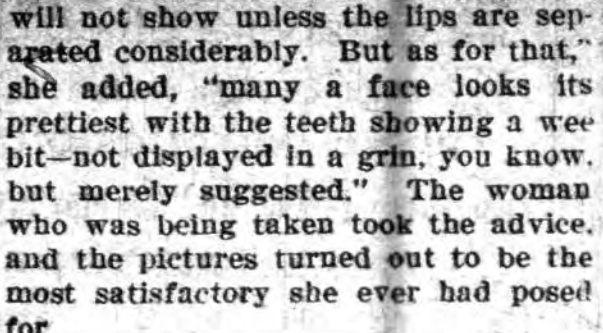
The poke shaped bonnet is becoming to a piquant face.

Parted Lips Soften Photograph. A woman was being posed for her photograph in a gallery the other day when a well known actress happened in. She stood a few moments watching the struggles of the sitter to assume a satisfactory expression. At last she offered a small suggestion. "If you will moisten the lips and slightly part them," said she, "you will find the face takes on a natural, unstrained expression at once. When the photograph is finished the mouth will not appear to be open in the least, but there will be a soft line where the lips meet. The teeth will not show unless the lips are separated considerably. But as for that," she added, "many a face looks its prettiest with the teeth showing a wee bit—not displayed in a grin, you know, but merely suggested." The woman who was being taken took the advice, and the pictures turned out to be the most satisfactory she ever had posed for.

Care of Aluminium. Aluminium utensils for the kitchen are becoming daily more popular on account of their light weight and cleanliness. They must never be washed with soda, soap and water being all that is required, with a little powdered whiting for polishing.

Ready For the Ball. Chiffon cloth as a material for the evening frock has lost none of its well earned popularity. It lends itself beautifully to draping and is light and at the same time durable.

The cut displays another variant of the ubiquitous black and white crepe.



PARTY FROCK OF CHIFFON CLOTH.

tions which this winter are to be seen in all woddish attire.

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